

*An Essay*

*on*

*That form of disease*  
*Nowologically called*  
*Dysentery*

*Dysentery*

*3 vols*



*By George W. Murray.*  
*of Pennsylvania.*

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Philadelphia

And  
Inaugural Dissertation  
for  
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Submitted  
to the examination of the  
Rev. John M. Dowell LL.D. Rector  
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of the  
University of Pennsylvania.  
on  
the 19<sup>th</sup> day of April, 1810.

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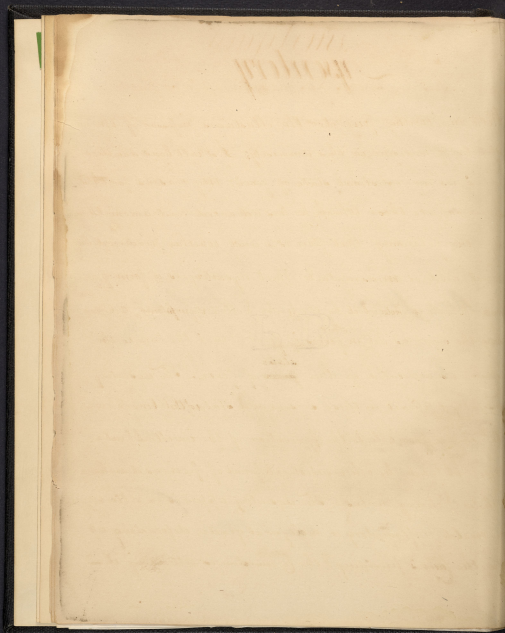
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My country presents the student a picture of the  
state of medicine in this country. I shall consider dys-  
entery as an intestinal state of fever. My reasons for this  
are three which he has advanced. In saying then  
the first says that fever is a unit whether produced by  
cold or inflammation. That dysentery is a form of fe-  
ver is indicated by the pulse & other symptoms; my own  
the same as are in fever of fever. That the same is the  
as indicated in the form of fever. The dysentery  
is a form of fever and that of the intestinal  
is a form of fever. The dysentery is a form of fever  
and the other intestinal forms of fever as dysentery  
& Cholera morbus. The dysentery appears in the  
intestinal glands depending on  
the general condition of the system and the  
circumstances attending it.



# Dysentery

With my worthy preceptor the illustrious professor of the institutes of medicine in this university; I shall consider dysentery as an intestinal state of fever; My reasons for this opinion are those which he has advanced and among them are the following. that fever is a unit whether produced by heat, cold or miasmata &c. that dysentery is a form of fever, which is indicated by the pulse & other symptoms; appearing the same as are in <sup>other</sup> forms of fever. & that the cure is the same as indicated in other <sup>states</sup> ~~forms~~ of fevers. The dysentery usually appears in those seasons and states of the atmosphere which are favorable to the generation of the remittent & intermittent and the other intestinal forms of fever, as diarrhoea cholera & cholera morbus. The dysentery appears in either a mild, inflammatory or malignant grade, depending upon the causes preceding & the circumstances attending it.

# Symptoms.

The symptoms which characterise this form of disease are various and different. I will enumerate some of them as mentioned by Authors & such as have come under my own notice ~~at~~ in the country. It Sometimes commences with costiveness & at others with a laxity of the bowels with all the symptoms of diarrhoea. "In most cases it commences with griping and frequent inclinations to go to stool," Nausea & vomiting Sometimes occurs. The pulse is either synocha, synochula, typhus or typhoid. As this form of disease advances the symptoms enumerated increase in violence & unless they are subdued by the power of medicine, the torture of the unhappy patient will soon be terminated by death. But this once formidable state of fever which swept away thousands, is now under the controul of medicine, & the new principles in medicine taught by Dr Rush has met the Hydræ in its forming state & thus conquered ~~that~~ a disease which formerly was but too frequently fatal, in consequence of that

undue attachment to nosology, which invariably compels us to  
wait untill it is completely evolved, its symptoms and diag-  
nostics become evident, and then the duty of the Physician -  
was, to pronounce the name & seat of the disease; seek in his nosol-  
ogical arrangement for the disease its cure - and thus give  
Medicines which were ordered perhaps a number of Years ago  
in a different Country, Climate and Constitution, not paying  
any Attention to the State of the System, grade or malignity of the  
present disease, as if the disease were as invariable in its char-  
acteristics as the Lion or the Oak &c. The experience of ages  
has taught us that disease changes with the atmosphere, cli-  
mate, Constitution & age of the patient, & that disease never appears  
twice with the same symptoms. Physicians have too late been  
taught this & by attending to nosological arrangements - have  
seen with the most poignant regrets, their friends & relations die,  
After all the materia medica had been exhausted to no purpose.  
If the sword has slain its thousands I may safely assert that  
nosology has slain its ten of thousands - it has had its reign,  
error & ignorance may ride triumphant, for a time. But truth  
& science will obtain their just superiority & regain their high  
Station. - This happy revolution in medical science was fostered

ed in the republic of our country, and the enlightened Rush  
under the auspices of genius and talents, has promulgated & taught  
theory and principles in medicine, which for simplicity & truth  
were never equalled, they not only discard nosology from the  
practice of Physicians, but they compel a physician to be ever  
watchful of his patients care, & like a guardian angel, <sup>watch</sup> the chang-  
ing state of his system & pulse which he happily calls - "the nosom-  
eter of the body, or is to the system, what the hands are to a  
Watch," thus telling every movement within & showing every de-  
parture from health. - It is true there are some exceptions but  
these are rare - and when the pulse refuses to indicate the state  
of the system from accidental circumstances, as diseased hearts  
pressure of surrounding muscles or a wrong direction of the  
radial artery, other parts of the body will perform a vicarious  
office as the eye, Tongue, Countenance &c. —

## Discharge from the intestines.

They are various in their consistence, colour and nature. Sometimes faeces are discharged in the form of balls called scybala, blood, blood & mucous the last sometimes with faecal matter, membrane of blood, lumps of fat, Sometimes there is no discharge upwards or downwards, which indicates the highest grade. Requires prompt & potent remedies which will be taken notice of presently. Tenesmus frequently accompanies the discharge or is a symptom. It is very distressing & is caused by "scybala, ulcers in the rectum, acuminony & a diseased contiguous viscera as the bladder" &c. —

# Appearances of Intestines after Death

1<sup>st</sup> No marks of disease, owing to the grade of disease trans-  
cending the Inflammatory point. —

2<sup>nd</sup> Inflammations.

3<sup>rd</sup> Membrane

4<sup>th</sup> Pustules

5<sup>th</sup> Mucous

6<sup>th</sup> Tubercles

7<sup>th</sup> Gangrene

## Diagnosis.

In a former part of this Essay, I have attempted to show the fallacy of Nosology, and all rules drawn from it - I therefore hope I shall be excused for not mentioning any diagnostics. No form or grade of disease can monopolize any pathognomonic sign as it is continually changing - a blind attachment to prejudices & error although supported by the first Physicians of the age, is highly injurious, in medical science. Where the health &c. of our fellow-citizens are at stake, I shall therefore pass over this part of my subject in silence.

## Prognosis, *in*

In every state of fever, the signs indicative of returning health or approaching death, are so various and uncertain - that the most scientific & experienced physicians on prognostication of disease, are frequently disappointed. - I hope it will be excusable in an inexperienced youth in not attempting any

## Remote Causes,

These are such as act directly on the alimentary canal & such as act indirectly, through the medium of the system generally. To the first belong miasmata, it and heat appear to be the chief remote causes. They are also sometimes the exciting causes. When the atmosphere is heated and charged with the effluvia arising from marshes &c. entering the body - act very powerfully on the intestines. Whether it is by the miasmata - causing an increased secretion & exertion <sup>of the liver</sup> and thus by its acrimony in the intestines, cause, dysentery, I shall not determine. If it be so, the importance of that very important viscus will be much augmented. It has already been proved by Dr Rush that many forms of disease whose causes were formerly supposed to be different to originate from a diseased state of the liver. And if this one be added it will add another powerfull argument in favour of the unity of disease, That dysentery sometimes proceeds from the causes acting primarily on the

the liver and producing disease is highly probable from dissection. Mr. Clarke treating of the diseases of India mentions several Cases of dysentery which on dissection proved that the liver was diseased. He in several Cases believes the diseased State of the liver was the cause of dysentery as will appear from the following quotations, after mentioning the appearances on dissections in the intestines he says "the liver was much smaller than natural, being probably only a third part of its usual size. It was also unusually pale, hard and unequal, but did not contain any purulent matter, I am of opinion that the obstructed State of the liver was probably the cause of the dysentery as well as the enlargement of the spleen & ascites. At the same time the dysentery was undoubtedly the immediate cause of death," In another place page 181 our author says when speaking of the dissection of a patient who died of dysentery "There were several collections of matter in different parts of the liver which could have had very little share in occasioning death. He never complained of pain in the hepatic region," We also read in the same author page 94, of the dissection of a dysentery patient as follows "On the surface of the liver there were several white coloured spots, evidently indicating the presence of purulent matter, and when cut into a consider-

able quantity was discharged, From a consideration of this case,  
I think we may justly infer that the obstructed state of the liver  
was the cause of the affection in the bowels & consequently of Death.  
From the consideration of these facts, I make no hesitation in af-  
firming that the diseased state of the liver sometimes produces dys-  
entery. A vegetable diet has a tendency to induce this disease.  
Cold is also one of the remote causes - Contagion has been sup-  
posed to be the remote cause of dysentery, However plausible it may  
appear, I think it is entirely unfounded. The effluvia arising  
from the excretions especially the faeces of a dysenteric patient may  
be one of the exciting causes in producing this form of fever. I will not  
deny - But that it has ever acted as a remote cause without being  
assisted by other causes either remote or exciting, I think quite  
improbable. As Marsh Miasmata <sup>are</sup> one of the most usual  
remote causes of dysentery. It is reasonable to suppose those breath-  
ing the same air and living on the same Aliments & drinks would  
be attacked by the same form of fever. But this never will take  
place unless there exist a similarity of constitution & a predispo-  
sition to the disease. It spreading whole neighbourhoods & fam-  
ilies, I do not consider as any proof of its contagious na-  
ture.

ture. The Intermittent & other forms of fever frequently pervade neighbourhoods & families, yet we do not call them contagious. Many Individuals have been attacked by this form of fever after being exposed to the effluvia of a sick room - and many others have not. When this was the case I should always infer, that a previous predisposition existed & the exciting cause, as the effluvia from the excretions, ushered in the disease. To believe in the contagious nature of the dysentery would be attended with the most dreadful consequence. What attentants could we procure for the patients, if they were hourly exposed to its baneful attacks; The unhappy patient must suffer, languish & die. See his friends depart & leave him to his fate. How inconsistent with the dictates of humanity & how derogatory to the godlike character of a physician. I cannot pass over this part of my Subject, without mentioning another injurious effect of nosology in ranking a certain number of the forms of fever under the head of contagious. How repugnant to Christianity, when they believe the form of fever to be contagious the patient is deserted, and hence the heart piercing cry from the sick room of a patient attacked with malignant fever, "Don't leave me, Don't

leave me," Caltrous must that heart be to sensibility & in amiable  
to the warm feelings of Christian love Who could close his ears  
against such heart rending appeals —————

Predisposing cause,

Debility.

Exciting causes,

The exciting causes of this form of fever are the same as with other forms. From the numbers which are afflicted with it after being exposed to the effluvia evolved from the excretions of a dysenteric patient. I believe such effluvia is a highly exciting cause and from this occurring so often, there is no doubt, but <sup>that</sup> ~~what~~ we may ascribe to it, the origin of the contagious nature of the dysentary. —

## Proximate Cause,

It would be useless in me to enumerate all the proximate causes which have been assigned to dysentery - as a great number of them are consigned to that oblivion they so justly merit.

Dr Bullen believed it to be a spasm. That spasm may occur I do not doubt - But that spasm is a cause of dysentery is quite improbable - Dr Rush believes spasm is one of the primary forms of <sup>dysentery</sup> ~~fever~~. It is the effect & not the cause, as well might we say ulcers in the lungs, pus in the liver or water in the brain to be the cause of consumption, hepatitis or hydrocephalus internus.

Dr Rush has taught morbid action to be the proximate cause, I consider the proximate cause & disease to be the same. Some opposition has been made to this opinion but upon what grounds I cannot understand. It appears to be a dispute merely about names, as those who are opposed to it, deny that the proximate cause can be the disease & the cause cannot be the effect. This controversy I will not decide, - But proceed to enquire what is meant by the proximate cause or where is the necessity for it. It I believe exists only in a

idea, a child of fancy & imaginary. The remote cause act-  
ed on the debilitated part of the system by the exciting cause,  
brought into action disease, which disease I believe with D.  
Rush to be morbid excitement, in the blood vessels - D. Rush  
calls this the proximate cause & says it is disease. - I cannot see  
the propriety of a proximate cause without<sup>we</sup> call the exciting  
cause also the proximate cause, as there has been more disputes  
about the proximate cause of disease than I think it is entitled to.  
I shall discard it, because I think it merely a name & of no prac-  
tical use thereby obviating that futile argument against the unity  
of disease & morbid excitement, and say that the remote cause  
acted upon the debilitated system which ~~by~~ brought into -  
action by the exciting cause, disease or morbid excitement -  
which consists in the "partial and irregular operation of  
disordered & debilitated nature". It is our duty to render this  
partial & irregular operation, equal & regular, & restore na-  
ture from disorder to <sup>order</sup> & debility to strength, or in other words  
to equalize the excitement & excitability, for their partial  
action constitutes disease. To do this <sup>we</sup> will favour the method

## Method of Cure.

In entering upon the method of Cure I wish in the first place to Observe, that no uniform mode of treatment can be recommended for any grade of disease. As every form of fever is continually changing, we must pay attention to the State of the System & pulse. With this view I shall mention those remedies recommended by Authors, & those which I have seen exhibited with the best advantage. And first of Blood letting. In the mild Inflammatory grade of this fever where the pulse is not much affected, bleeding is of little Service. The blood Vessels of the Intestines being situated so remote from the general Circulation that Bleeding in the Inflammatory Stage is of very little Service, unless carried to such extent as would endanger the general System of the patient, & debilitate it below the point of reaction. This being the case in the Inflammatory Stage it is our Intent, to obtain a medicine which would seduce the Action of the blood Vessels of the Intestines, without much debilitating the general system. To obtain this end

nourishing cathartics have been found most efficacious —  
And the one which has been found the best in the practice of  
my former preceptor Dr. Senks is the  
*Spicacuanha*.

Its Virtues in curing the inflammatory stage of dysentery are  
very great and recommends it to the attention of the Medi-  
cal World. Dr. Senks has given it in every case which has  
come under his care and with the happiest success. Its good  
effect appears to arise from its power inducing the action of  
the blood Vessels of the intestines. But in what manner it  
produces this effect, I will not pretend to say, but leave it  
to abler and more scientific persons. We should suppose  
reasoning a priori that other cathartics, as Glauber's Salty  
Gels. Oil &c. Would have the same effect in reducing the ac-  
tion, experience however & being thus tried in my preceptor's  
hands have taught me the fallacy of such an opinion,  
invariably finding that their effect, were not such as to

of the ipecacuanha which immediately stopped the progress  
of the disease. Dr. Ferri's favorite prescription is in the form of  
pills of two or three grains if the stomach will bear it, <sup>half</sup> every <sup>hour</sup>  
untill a moderate evacuation is produced, keeping the patient  
in bed promoting a perspiration. - When the dysentery is high-  
ly inflammatory, blood letting must be used - and the ipecacuanha  
joined with balsamol is highly necessary, Demulcents & mucil-  
aginous drinks are to be given, in order to relieve the pain and  
blunt the Acrimony of the faeces. When the Stomach refuses to  
retain the ipecacuanha, it can be given in the form of injection  
With good effect, and in confirmation of it, I will quote a few  
lines from W. Clarke who says "The form of Injection which I  
have found to answer best; has been three drams of ipecacuanha  
root, bruised and boiled in a quart to a pint of Water and  
given as an injection at once." Also Starch Injections Or -  
Starch combined With ipecacuanha has been found to  
answer very Well in some cases. Emetic tartar, <sup>&</sup> Rhubarb  
~~and~~ have been given by some Physicians With success

but having never given them nor seen them prescribed I shall  
pass them over; being contented with the one under consider-  
ation. If the ipecacuanha should answer the same end in the  
hands of other physicians as well as my preceptor - It will be of  
great benefit to mankind, It is a plant of our own country &  
can be obtained cheap which certainly is an object when at-  
tending on the Indigent; After the inflammatory action has been  
reduced by the above depletion; the chalk & opiate may be  
given if the stomach will not retain them, they can be thrown up  
the rectum. Blisters are highly useful in translating morbid excite-  
ment from a more to a less vital part of the system. They should ne-  
ver be applied until the system is reduced in some degree & they  
should be applied to the limbs or anels in preference to any other  
part. The manner of their acting I do not know unless by the Symp-  
toms of continuity, which appears to be the most plausible & correct  
theory of any I have heard. The above plan of cure has always <sup>an</sup> answer  
with Dr. Ferrius in the inflamm<sup>atory</sup> stage. But dysentery appears some-  
times under so malignant a form & the system so prostrated as to forbid every  
kind of depletion. Here Barks, opium and cordials should

be administered freely as they are the only remedies which can  
save the patients.

Thus Gentlemen have I finished my Essay, It is Imperfect,  
from its brevity, my ill state of Health and want of time, these  
reasons & my inexperience I hope will shield it from that just  
criticism which no doubt it merits, accept of my thanks for  
your assiduity in teaching me while I was a student & I am  
particularly indebted to Professor Barton who has acted  
towards me as a friend, I hope in my future life, he will  
still continue to be one.

